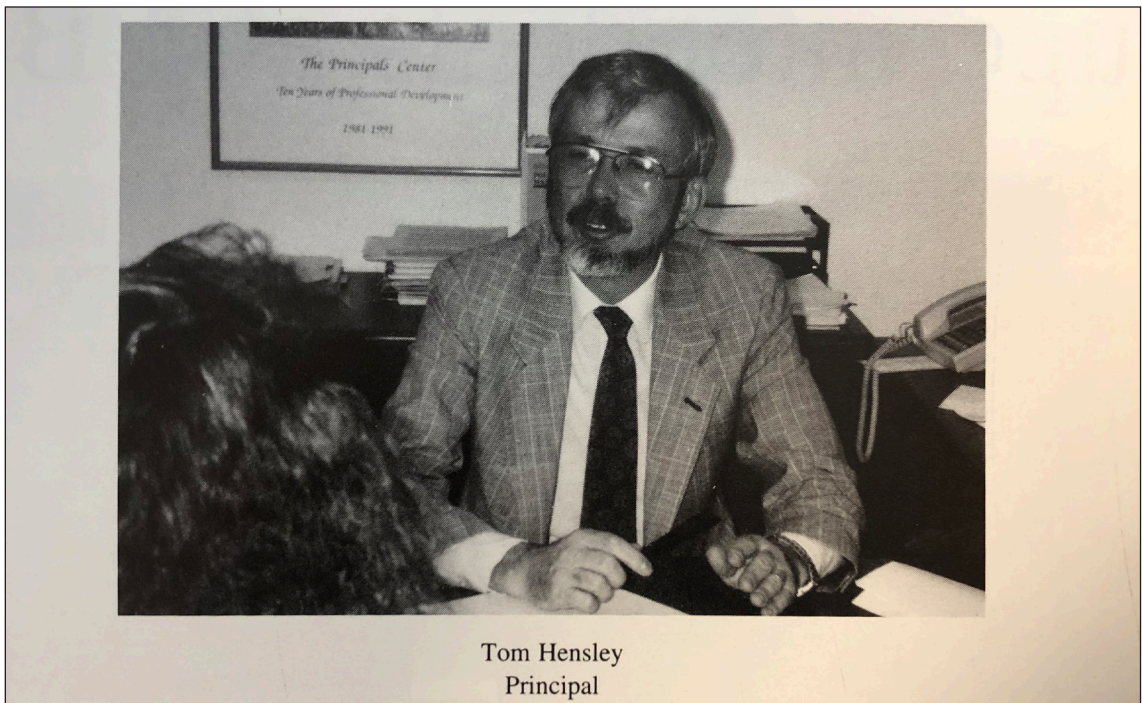


School’s first principal passes away



Dr. Tom Hensley sits at his desk for a photograph by the Pinnacle Yearbook in 1993. Hensley served as head principal for five years. (Photo used with permission from Pinnacle Yearbook)

Danika Stilwell
Editor-in-Chief

Founding principal, Dr. Thomas Lee Hensley, passed away on Jan. 29, 2021 at the age of 75. He was an alumnus of both Southeast Missouri State University (SEMO) and the University of Missouri-St. Louis (UMSL) along with being a United States Army veteran prior to his time within the Rockwood School District. One of Hensley’s three children is Anne Cunningham, a current teacher in the district at the Center for Creative Learning (CCL).

She said she was grateful that she chose to attend Summit and see her father’s vision come to life, as it impacts her as a teacher to this day. “Looking back, I am so thankful that I was able to join my dad as a student at Rockwood Summit. Not only did we build a very special father-daughter bond, but I also learned a lot from him that has influenced my career in education. Obviously, I wasn’t aware of this as a high school student, but I know that seeing my dad in his role as the leader of a school definitely shaped my philosophy of teaching and how I interact with my students,”

Cunningham said. During his time at the head of the school for five years, Hensley hired several current staff members, including fine arts teacher Angela Rice, science teacher Darrin Peters, athletic director Mitch Lefkowitz, journalism teacher Clay Zigler, language arts teacher Gretchen Moorman, assistant principal Erik Graham, math teachers Shannon Walton, Renee Matlock, and Gayle Piepho, and guidance counselor Gerri Bollinger. Bollinger first met Hensley as a student at UMSL and said she was later hired by him to teach at Rockwood South Middle School

prior to hiring her for her role at the school. “Dr. Hensley was my professor at UMSL when I returned to school after college to get my teaching certificate for social studies. I took Philosophy of Education with him. He told us to let him know if he could ever do anything for us. When I finished with my certificate, I called him at EHS to see if he could give me a practice interview. He gave me a real one, but it was tied to being an assistant football coach. I explained that I loved football and would be happy to do it, but the head principal said no,” Bollinger said. “He then recommended me to Rockwood South [and] I got that job. When Summit was being planned, Tom was at RSMS for a year and was able to interview people for Summit. Again, he chose me for a social studies and STUCO sponsor.” Later, when Hensley hired Zigler in 1995, he kick started the school’s journalism program. Zigler said Hensley recognized his goals for the yearbook and newspaper and trusted him to succeed with them. “He was very low-key and he wanted you to do your thing, not just with journalism but with all teachers. He felt that if [he] hired you, [he knew] you’re going to do the job,” Zigler said. The creation of an excellent staff was one aspect of Hensley’s impact, he also was heavily involved in the design of both

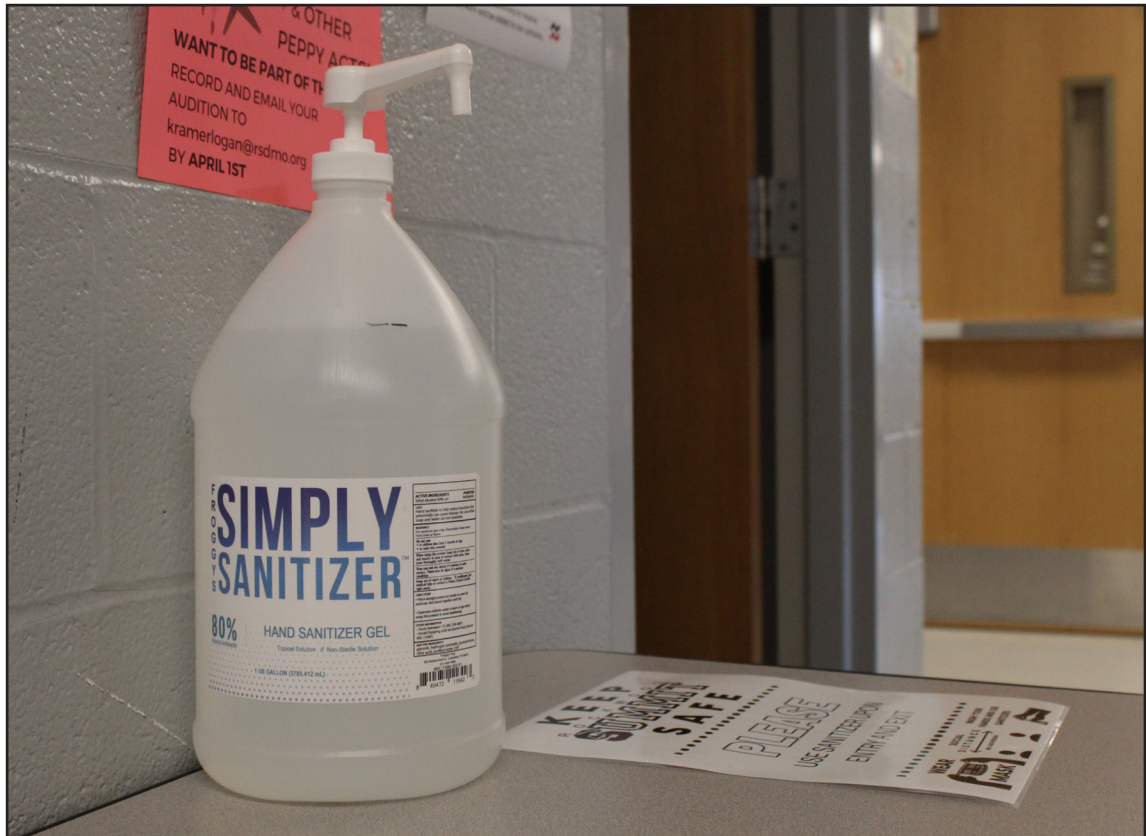
the building and the school’s mission. Cunningham said it was not a responsibility he took lightly, and the formation of the school was one of his greatest accomplishments in his career. “Being hired as the principal of Rockwood Summit was the pinnacle of my dad’s career in education. Opening a brand new high school was literally a dream come true for him, and he took his role as its leader very seriously. Because he loved architecture, my dad was excited to work with the architects to design and build a school that would serve its staff and students well and physically stand the test of time,” Cunningham said. “As much as my dad planned the actual school building, however, he devoted even more thought to developing the mission for the school. He was a visionary, and he wanted to ‘build a tradition of excellence.’ He hired the best educators and staff to bring this vision to life. A very student-centered educator, his guiding principle in every decision was ‘What is best for the students?’” Bollinger said Hensley’s legacy is still present at Summit through the school’s mission to give focus to the students. “He was very kid-centered and always asked what was in the best interest of a student. For years I have been told how different it is here from other Rockwood high schools, both by subs and staff who have transferred here.”

Hand sanitizer levels stall since November *Talon finds gel provided by school not used as expected*

Carrie Sandler
News Editor

Despite current health recommendations to use sanitizer to prevent the spread of COVID-19, students and staff do not appear to take full advantage of the sanitizing jugs placed around the school. In order to return to school safely, multiple precautions were taken, with one of those health recommendations being to sanitize regularly. With sanitizing being reiterated since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, jugs of generic hand sanitizer have been placed throughout the school in order to follow the guidelines set in place by St. Louis County. Principal Dr. Emily McCown said the decision to place the hand sanitizers around the school was made primarily by the district. “[To prepare for school] the district placed a large order for the hand sanitizer this summer [to which] our head custodian and I determined the number we felt we needed,” McCown said. With this in mind the decision was to place sanitizers not only around the school, but also outside or inside of teacher’s classrooms with the goal for students to use the sanitizer before entering and

leaving the classroom. However, the effectiveness of this goal is debatable. The Talon measured the change in each jug, and noticed little to no change on a weekly basis. According to McCown, most students have not been using the hand sanitizer which she said may just be out of a lack of habit. “I think kids tend to have a sense of invincibility overall so that may be a factor, [so they may have] the feeling they don’t necessarily need [to use] it,” McCown said. Similarly to McCown, other staff members have taken notice of the lack of use of hand sanitizer by students. Assistant Principal Erik Graham said that the hand sanitizer outside his office has been primarily used by himself and his secretary. “I primarily use the hand sanitizer outside my room, my secretary does, occasionally a teacher uses it too,” Graham said. “I don’t see many students using it.” Adding onto the reasoning of lack of habit, some students do not use the school provided sanitizers because of the texture of the sanitizer. Sophomore Taylor Spencer said she uses her own sanitizer for a number of reasons, including the texture of the sanitizer. “With the school sanitizers



On the third floor, a container of sanitizer sits outside a restroom. The Talon marked on several containers in mid January, and since then little sanitizer has been depleted. (Photo by Ruth Vogel)

everyone is putting their hands on the pump which defeats the purpose of the sanitizer, so I use my own because of that and because I don’t like the consistency of the school’s hand sanitizer,” Spencer said. While some students do still choose to use hand sanitizer, some

still do not, which leads to the possible question of mandating the use of hand sanitizer similar to that of mandating the mask. However, Graham said he does not believe that mandating hand sanitizers would be something that would be considered. “As of now we are following

the guidelines of St. Louis County which does not include mandating hand sanitizer, so as of now we are not requiring students to use it,” Graham said. “Overall the transmission of COVID-19 by surface or touch is not as risky as traveling airborne, so it is not as big of a concern.”